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COUNTRY REPORTS

Cooperation between official mapping agencies in Europe

Paper submitted by the Comité Européen des Responsables de la Cartographie Officielle (CERCO)**

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CERCO was founded in 1980 by five governmental mapping agencies in Europe. Currently, it has 34 members, either full-members or observers. CERCO has normally one General Assembly in a year organised by a member agency. Besides the General Assemblies, the work of CERCO will be carried out through a Management Board, Working Groups and by correspondence. CERCO has a part-time secretary.

The Management Board is composed of the President and ex-president or incoming president and three elected members.

The principal purpose of CERCO is to encourage the exchange of information on matters of mutual concern between the national mapping agencies of Europe and, by so doing, to strengthen the co-operation between its members.

CERCO also wants to secure and reinforce the presence of itself and its members in all fields of the cartographic and geographic information community in Europe, taking into account the needs existing in the market.

Furthermore, CERCO tries to identify subjects for which common policies are appropriate, assist in their formulation, and encourage their acceptance by all those involved.

CERCO has currently four working groups, which are open for all members. One is dealing with copy-right and legal issues, one with geodesy, one with updating of databases and the newest one with the quality problems of digital databases. Working groups give their progress reports annually to the General Assembly of CERCO.

More information will be provided by the Secretary General of CERCO, Mr John Leonard, whose official address is:

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MEGRIN (Multipurpose European Ground Related Information Network)

An urgent need of pan-European digital geographic data sets was recognized by CERCO in the early 1990's. It started the process by the end of which the MEGRIN GIE was established in 1995 by 19 CERCO members under the French law in Paris. MEGRIN GIE has produced so far two products; GDDD and SABE.

GDDD - Geographic Data Description Directory, helps you to find European digital geographic information which you need. More than 36 National Mapping Agencies (NMA) have described their own datasets.

SABE - Seamless Administrative Boundaries of Europe, contains detailed administrative boundaries for 25 European countries.

MEGRIN GIE has also started *a PETIT - project, Study of European Topographic Data.* As Europe becomes more closely linked, pan-European topographic data will become increasingly important. Organisations need to be able to monitor their activities using reliable and comparable data. Digital maps at the scale of 1 : 250 000 may well be appropriate for applications at European level. PETIT is a study to investigate the feasibility of using the Vmap level 1 specifications created by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency as the first step in creation of data meeting a common specification.

More information is available from the MEGRIN secretariat:

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CERCO *and the pan-European geographic information policy*

There is an urgent need of pan-European harmonious, homogenious digital geographic datasets. The problem is that mapping and geographic datasets in general are very national by nature.

The Commission of the European Union has therefore started to prepare a document (Towards a European Policy Framework for Geographic Information, November 1996, GI 2000 Initiative), which describes the principles, procedures, practices and issues in general, which are necessary in creation of European geographic information policy. It is intended to give this document in the form of the Communication to the Parliament of the European Union and to the Council of Ministers of the European Union. This is expected to happen in the very near future.

This activity pursues the same objectives, which in the United States were launched by President Clinton in his Executive Order on 11 April 1994 to set up the National Spatial Data Infrastructure.

CERCO and its members have been working in close co-operation with the Commission in drafting the document.

CERCO has stressed especially the following points:

- There is an urgent need for geographic base data as a part of an information infrastructure for the whole of Europe. Its creation and subsequent maintenance need to be ensured.

- Despite the essential and long-term benefits to be enjoyed from having an effective pan-European information infrastructure, there are significant start-up costs and managerial and technical challenges to be met. Expecting market forces to care for these is unrealistic.

- National Mapping Agencies already hold large volumes of geographic data. The huge investments made in national digital data makes a failure if exploited in an unthinkable way. CERCO believes that the creation of pan-European geographic base data will be cheaper if existing national data forms the basis of the process, even if there will be additional costs in converting national data to European data.

- The resources of NMAs are appropriate to finance only national responsibilities. Thus it falls to CEC to find funding for the additional effort. CEC will have to continue to take the lead by creating the appropriate financial and political climate and by co-ordinating the various interests if the initiative is to progress.

- If a Task Force is set up for carrying on the GI2000 initiative, CERCO would want to be involved.